

WHO KNOWS REAL LITERARY GREATNESS WHEN HE SEES IT?—A POET WORTH WHILE

WHEN LITERARY PLANETS SWING INTO OUR KEN

Their Greatness Is Not Always Recognized. Is William McFee a Fixed Star or a Meteorite?

"I HAVE often wished that I had been alive when 'PICKWICK PAPERS' first appeared," remarked Doctor McFabre, as he looked over the set of Dickens in my bookcase. "I think it would have been interesting to have been present when a new literary planet swung into our ken."

"Do you think you would have known that it was a planet?" I said.

"Of course he wouldn't have known," said Owen with a chuckle. "One never recognizes greatness at first, and the nearer one is to it the more difficult does it become to distinguish between it and mediocrity. This is such a trite commonplace that I do not need to remind you of it, doctor."

"But Dickens was 'recognized at once,'" said I. "Perhaps the 'high-brows' did not appreciate him at first, but the plain people, on whose liking great literary success depends, knew at once that he was a man writing something that they liked. He did not have to wait for success. It came to meet him."

"I think, in spite of what Owen says, confound his impudence, that I would have found 'PICKWICK PAPERS' worth while." Doctor McFabre insisted. "I hope my tastes are not too high to be pleased with what my neighbors like."

"A more important question, doctor," said I. "Is whether you are able to recognize the literary planets that are swinging out of the vast void into our intellectual solar system at the present time?"

"Who are they?" This came with a snap from the lips of the clergyman.

"There are men who think that William McFee is one of them," I replied.

"McFee? Who is he? I never heard of him."

"Listen to that, Owen," said I. "Here is a man who wishes he were alive when Dickens began to write that has never heard of a man whose first book of importance has been out more than two years and has been hailed as one of the most brilliant novels of the generation!"

"I confess that I am about as ignorant as the doctor," said Owen. "I have heard the name in connection with a book called 'Casuals of the Sea' but that is all I know about him."

"It is about time you learned some more," I went on. "McFee was born in 1881. His father was a Scotch skipper and his mother came from one of the Canadian provinces.

WILLIAM MCFEE

The background of a philosophy of life, this is what McFee has done in his first book."

"Has he written more than one?" Doctor McFabre wanted to know.

"He has at least three to his credit. I went on. "They all appeared first in England. The third, called 'Alens,' has just been published in America. It is also an unusual story; in many respects pleasanter than 'Casuals of the Sea.' It is largely autobiographical, for the hero is a marine engineer, the externals of whose life correspond closely with those of McFee. The title suggests the social problem which the author has set out to exhibit, a gentleman. The boy, studying in an engineering school attended by gentlemen's sons, discovers after a time that he is an alien there, with no points of contact with his associates. He throws up his job and goes

NEW POETRY OF THE NEW CENTURY

Wilfrid Wilson Gibson Reflects the Sociological Spirit of His Times

to sea on a tramp steamship, and finds out that his education and training had made him an alien among the seamen. He marries an Italian wife and brings her to America, where she lives as an alien, out of touch with the people around her. The man himself has an intellectual life so fine and broad that his wife is unable to share it and he is in a way an alien in his own home. This is the social thread on which a most uncommon story is strung.

"The construction of the story will interest you, doctor. Its scene is laid in Nutley, barely disguised under the name of Netley. The engineer's wife lives next door to an artist and his wife who have a writer living with them. The writer tells the story. They all wonder who the Italian woman is who has so little to do with her neighbors. They scrape an acquaintance with her two little boys and learn that the husband is at sea. They indulge in characteristic suburban gossip about the household. One day the husband comes home and he is persuaded to tell his story. He talks for a long time one Saturday afternoon, relates his tale Sunday morning and continues it Sunday afternoon. The artist, his wife, the writer and the village postmistress gossip about it in chapters which come in the intervals of the tale. The plot is unusual, but one would scarcely read it for plot. It is remarkable for the unrelenting realism of its pictures of life, for its tolerance of human foibles and failings, as if McFee had put himself in the place of the Judge of all the world, in Howells' line poem and had lifted up the pity of his face on those who had been made what they might become, and had refused to condemn any mortal entangled in the coils of fate. McFee has formed his philosophy of life in the silent watches of the night at sea, where he was alone with the vastness of the infinite waste of waters and the infinite dome of stars. There is a freshness about it, therefore, which is delightful and stimulating. 'Alens' is a book for thoughtful people and for people who read for intellectual enjoyment rather than for mere amusement. Yet, I am not sure that McFee is the great genius that his enthusiastic admirers would have us believe. He is unusual and refreshing and for that reason he ought to be welcomed when there is so much commonplace stuff written by novelists who do nothing but rewrite the old stories from the old point of view."

"Your sermons might be improved, doctor, if you should spend a year at sea, thinking over what you believe and what things really matter," said Owen.

"I have no doubt of it," the clergyman conceded.

GEORGE W. DOUGLAS,
ATLANTA, Ga. William McFee, Garden City, Georgia, \$1.50.

"As a highly irresponsible prophet," begins Captain Alan Bott, M.C., of the Royal Flying Corps, in his graphic war book, "Ends and Odds," of his graphic war book, "Cavalry of the Clouds," "I am convinced that toward the end of the war, fatalities in the air will become as deplorable as hostilities on the land or sea."

In four sonnets written in memory of Rupert Brooke. They have imagination, wit and a sense of beauty which can be no great poetry. The last of the series October shows how their perils and joys have ended.

What is to take the place of the Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne of the last generation? Is that a question that has been asked by many a lover of poetry with little hope of a satisfactory answer? Kipling was very good, as far as he went, but one cannot think of literature and Kipling's verse at the same time. It has power. It is inspired by the breath of vigorous British imperialism. And there is music in it now and then. But Kipling at his best is not so far below Tennyson and Browning and Swinburne that one need be put to shame in the same breath with them when speaking of great English poets. Robert Bridges, the laureate, is admired by the dilettante, but no one else reads him. It is doubtful if there are a hundred persons in all America who can repeat a line that he ever wrote.

Yet a poet has arisen who may in time become a worthy successor of the mighty dead. He is Wilfrid Wilson Gibson, of Hove, East Sussex, England, in 1875, and now thirty-five years old. He has published seven or eight little volumes of verse, the first in 1897, when he was twenty-one. These volumes have recently been combined into one under the title of "Collected Poems 1894-1917," which is offered in the publisher's catalog in verse. It goes without saying that the later poems are far superior in poetic quality and in insight to the earlier ones. If he improves for the next ten years as he has for the last decade, his place will be secure.

But who ever expected to find a likeness to the older poets in him will be disappointed. He is intellectually a product of the twentieth century, a century in which the old theories of the advantages of class distinctions have been discredited and the problems of the poor and despised are receiving greater consideration than in any previous period. It is a time of social revolution. Mr. Gibson has considered the lot of the hitherto unconsidered. His methods are those of the realist, in studies, particularly those of the working man in the little hamlet who has to struggle for his daily bread, the fate of the wife whose husband has little tenderness because the hardness of his lot calluses his soul as well as his hands, the martyrdom of the seamstress in London who longs for the rural life left behind, the girl who, in her verse, is suggestive of the fiction of the American novelist, to its searching out for the sad expression of the fate which overcomes so many in their struggle to keep body and soul together. And it particularizes instead of generalizes. There is none of the dreamy, academic theories of the poet who has been educated in the universities. The poems are simple, direct, full of life, very close at hand. His war verse is not highbrow nonsense about fading the cannon and dashing to victory, but is more like Stephen Crane's "Red Badge of Courage," compressed into a dozen lines. Here is a bit which enters into the heart of the civilian turned soldier:

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Here is another, a reverie of a man in the trenches:

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Verse of a different quality appears

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THE SUPERNATURAL IN MODERN ENGLISH FICTION. By Dorothy Scarborough. Columbia University Press, New York. \$1.50. Putnam's Sons, \$2.

Dr. Herrick's History of Commerce

Marketing has achieved a place of national importance in the public eye—and much deservedly, as Dr. Herrick, president of Girard College, has proved himself, in "Marketing and Industry," a master of that art. Here is a textbook which is not only instructive, but interesting, which makes it all the more instructive. At the end of each chapter are a number of "suggested questions and topics" which are remarkably stimulative of original thought and research. There are also numerous illustrations, some of well-chosen illustrations. The book is designed primarily for the use of classes in commercial high schools, but will doubtless find a place in colleges. The general reader will find it worth his while.

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